

EPISODE **100**

Jeanne Birdsall, The Penderwicks, and over 4 Million Downloads

Guest: Jeanne Birdsall

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Meet **Jeanne Birdsall**



Jeanne Birdsall is a New York Times best selling author. Perhaps you are familiar with The Penderwicks series - middle grade novels that have collected a slew of awards, including the National Book Award for Young People's Literature.

She also writes picture books for younger children, including *Flora's Very Windy Day* and *Lucky and Squash*.

She lives in Northhampton, Mass., with her husband, a Boston Terrier named Cagney and her pet cats.

In This **Episode**

Sarah and the Jeanne discuss her books, her writing process, and Jeanne answers questions from fans including how to send her fan mail, and how to get signed copies of her books.

The Listening Guide

Use this guide to skip to parts that most interest you, or listen to the entire podcast.

- **1:49** Meet Jeanne
- **3:32** The first Penderwicks book gets published
- **8:23** Jeanne's writing process
- **11:53** Where the story came from
- **14:28** Get signed copies!
- **15:09** Which books inspired Jeanne
- **16:52** What you might not know about the characters
- **21:03** Ahhhh, Mr. Penderwick
- **22:27** Questions about the craft of writing
- **27:42** The hardest part of writing
- **29:26** Let's talk about revision
- **32:23** What's next from Jeanne Birdsall...
- **33:53** Book 5: The Penderwicks at Last
- **37:58** Fan mail
- **39:14** Writing tips
- **44:06** Let the kids speak

"What I wanted to do is to be part of the conversation that started with E. Nesbit, Edward Eagar, C. S. Lewis, Elizabeth Enright, Eleanor Estes. I'm talking back to them. I'm saying, 'Thank you for this. I love this part.' But, I'm also talking forward to the people who are reading my books. And then I tell children, 'Maybe you'll be part of the conversation, too.'" - Jeanne Birdsall

Quotes and Questions

* **Needing structure**

"That first rush of 'Oh, I can do whatever I want' is too much for me, there's too many possibilities. I love it when that's all in place, and then I can really start with the emotions, the funny stuff, and the conversation. That's what I love the most. **I'm actually a revision-driven writer... which is lucky for me.**"

* **Unexpected publishing.**

"I was so certain that it wouldn't even get published that **I let myself do exactly what I wanted and instead of trying to figure out what the market was like or what people would respond to.** I had this very long plan that I would learn to write with the first one, just do exactly what I wanted, and then maybe by the third book I'd know enough what I was doing, and then they'd publish the whole series."

* **On C.S. Lewis.**

"I remember being in fifth grade and out in the recess with my friend, Susan, and we would say, **'If we just go past that tree we'll be in Narnia.'** And we knew it wouldn't happen but somehow we weren't absolutely positive it wouldn't happen, that in-between, and that's what he's done, that's what he did for people."

* **A 'safe enough hub' ...**

"What I was writing about was let's make this family bigger, which is what I believe in. That **you keep a safe enough hub, and if you take good enough care of yourself (meaning, myself) that then more and more people will come in.**

* **Just read ...**

"**Just read voraciously.** The written language - the way you tell a story in written language - is different than oral language. Some things are longer, some things are shorter, there's a different rhythm, there are different words you use; you have to *learn* that language before you can start creating in it ... **But, the good thing about my method is that you get to read lots of books.**"

Show Notes

Books from today's episode:

- The Penderwicks series
- Book 5: The Penderwicks at Last
- Flora's Very Windy Day
- My Favorite Pets: by Gus W. For Mrs. Smolinski's Class
- Lucky and Squash
- 100 Cupboards
- Outlaws of Time
- Little Women
- The Chronicles of Narnia
- The Story of the Treasure Seekers
- The Secret Garden
- Anne of Green Gables
- Jo's Boys
- Little Men
- Moods

Other links from today's show:

- Interview with Jeanne and N.D. Wilson
- Jeanne's [site](#)
- Buy signed copies
- Send fan mail for Jeanne to [Broadside Bookshop](#)
- RAR #42: Inspiring Parents in Children's Literature: A Conversation with Greta Eskridge

To find more resources to help you build your family culture around books, visit ReadAloudRevival.com.